# UNITED STATES
# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR
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## THE MOUNTAIN LION

Call him puma, mountain lion, cougar, catamount, panther,or painter...

he's still a great cat, and one of the most controversial meat-eaters

in this hemisphere.

"Puma" was the name bestowed on this wilderness wanderer by
ancient Incas. Many people spend their lives in "puma country" without
seeing one. Not only do these big cats shun man, but they each require
a great deal of "elbow room." This need for space keeps them spread
thinly, even in areas where they are undisturbed.

The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and
Wildlife reports that the mountain lion originally ranged from Patagonia
in far South America up through Mexico, the United States and into
British Columbia. From sea level to high mountain slopes, it probably
had as wide a natural distribution as any American mammal. Pumas were
once found in every State except Alaska and Hawaii. Forests along the
eastern seaboard, southern swamps, watercourses of the Great Plains,
western mountains, and deserts all knew their hunting tread.

To this cat--like all felines--hunting is the way of life. Deer
is a favored prey, tying in closely with the lion's extensive range. With
man came the introduction of livestock and drastic changes in use of the
land. Today most of the historic range of this cat is no longer suitable,
but in those areas where food is abundant and man not so ominously present,
the lion still persists. The population of this tawny, king-size cat has
been estimated at several thousand, but its secretive ways makes census
difficult.

Kittens are usually born in rocky caverns, but occasionally the den is
in dense brush. Litters vary from one to six, with an average of two. Young
lions open their eyes at about 10 days, nurse for 4 to 5 weeks, and are then
able to eat fresh meat brought by the mother. The kittens are spotted, but
spots disappear as the animal reaches maturity. When fully grown the color
may be reddish, brown, or slate gray. Half-grown kittens kill ground

squirrels, rabbits, and other small animals. Little is known about family ties, but 2-year-olds often accompany their mothers on hunting forays. Pumas reach breeding age between 2 and 3 years and mate every 2 or 3 years after that. Captive lions have lived to be 18 years old.

The largest mountain lion on record weighed 276 pounds and measured 8 feet, 8 inches from tip of tail to nose, but the average is about 150 pounds and about 7 feet long.
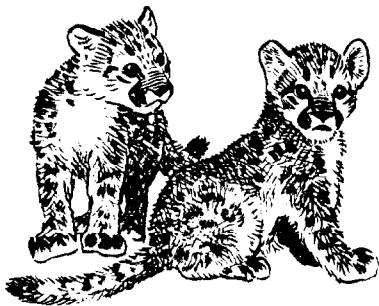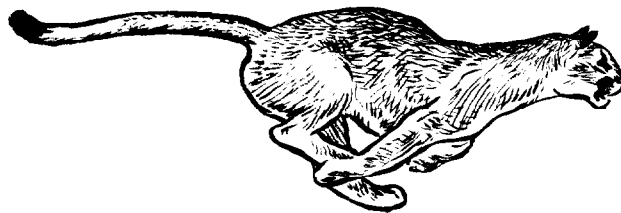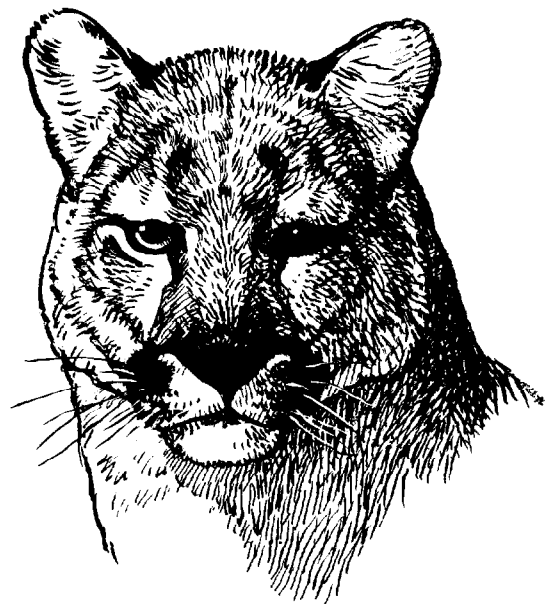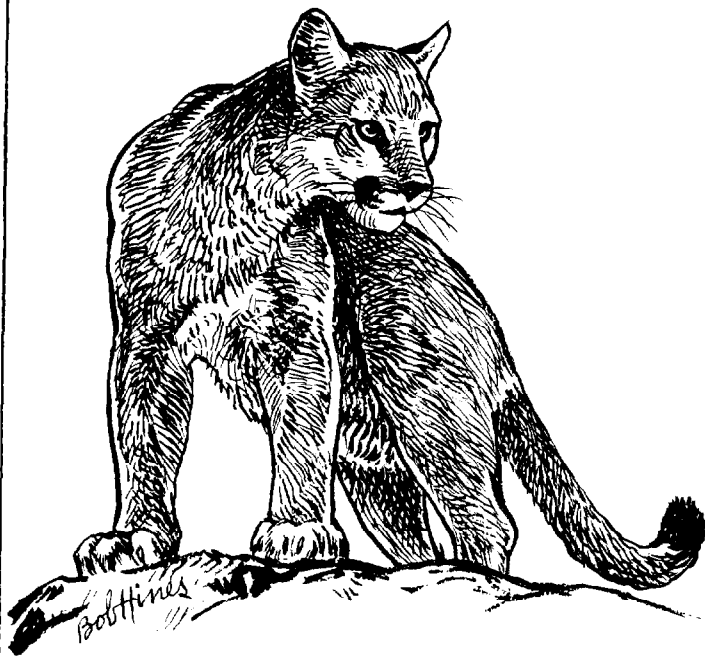
Humans are fascinated by the unknown, and because the puma's shyness prevents close observation, many are the folk tales of danger associated with this feline. One such tale alleged that its "scream" was made to imitate the cries of a woman for the purpose of luring gallant men to their death. In reality, stories of unprovoked attacks upon humans have little factual basis.

Mountain lions in the wildlife community raise questions for game managers. Do these great cats take too many deer that would ordinarily be taken by hunters? Should pumas be controlled to increase deer herds or perhaps stocked to help keep deer from becoming overabundant? Then there are livestock losses. Usually only one or a very few "outlaw" cats are to blame. Such local "lawbreakers" can generally be controlled without endangering the species or seriously reducing puma numbers. The cougar has been classed as a game animal in some western States. Several others list him as a predator with no legal protection. Only Arizona continues to pay a bounty on pumas.

The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife believes that pumas should be considered as trophy, big-game animals with provisions for preventing livestock losses and that ways should be explored to manage lion numbers in balance with other wildlife populations.

Given such protection, this fabled cat will wander the remote reaches of America's great open spaces and be a part of our treasured wildlife heritage for future generations.

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